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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 MANAMA 001782

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [MOPS](#) [MASS](#) [BA](#) [IR](#) [REGION](#) [BILAT](#)
OFFICIALS
SUBJECT: SCENESETTER FOR OCTOBER 18-19 VISIT OF THE GULF
SECURITY DIALOGUE DELEGATION

Classified By: CDA Susan L. Ziadeh for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) We warmly welcome the October 18-19 visit to Bahrain of the interagency Gulf Security Dialogue delegation led by PM Assistant Secretary Hillen and DOD Assistant Secretary for International Security Rodman. Your trip follows on the heels of the October 11 visit of CENTCOM Commander General Abizaid, who discussed regional security, in particular Iran and Iraq, at length with Crown Prince Shaikh Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa and Defense Minister General Shaikh Khalifa bin Ahmed Al Khalifa. You will also meet with the Crown Prince, with the Defense Minister participating in that meeting, and separately with Foreign Minister Shaikh Khalid bin Ahmed Al Khalifa.

12. (S) Your Bahraini interlocutors remain concerned about heightened tensions with Iran and will want to hear your views on U.S. plans to contain Iran, with specific reference to Iran's nuclear ambitions. The GOB is suspicious of Iran's nuclear program and its assertiveness in dealing with the Arab Gulf States but remains engaged in a "correct" bilateral relationship. Bahrain is interested in enhancing our mil-mil relationship in light of Iran, proposing a regional or bilateral exercise, assistance in updating military plans on Iran, systems interoperability, and participation in a coalition naval task force in the NAVCENT AOR. Bahrain is closely watching political and security developments in Iraq and is concerned about the potential for civil war and resulting sectarian violence spilling over into the region. Bahrain passed and implemented a counter-terrorism law that specifically criminalizes conspiracy, but the public prosecutor judged that the law's provisions did not allow him to charge several young Sunni extremists who confessed recently to planning to travel to Afghanistan for "jihad." The King announced that parliamentary and municipal elections will be held on November 25, and politicians and political societies representing a broad range of opinion will participate. A recent report alleging a senior government official's organized attempt to sway election outcomes has roiled the political scene.

Dealing With Iran

13. (C) The Bahraini leadership is greatly concerned about increased tensions between the international community and Iran. Bahrain hosted a two-day conference in mid-September for GCC countries during which the Interior Minister expressed concern about GCC countries finding themselves caught in the middle of nuclear powers. Crown Prince Salman suggested to GEN Abizaid that the U.S. and GCC countries hold

an exercise similar to Bright Star in the Gulf, which would send a strong signal to Iran. He claimed the Saudis are interested in participating in such an exercise, but welcomed a bilateral exercise if a regional one proved too difficult. The Defense Minister said that Bahrain had not updated its military plans on Iran in ten years and requested the participation of a U.S. team to assist in an effort to do so.

14. (C) The GOB continues to express interest in improving its air defense posture and has inquired about obtaining Patriot missiles, a capability that is currently beyond the limits of FMS/FMF. A plus-up in FMF will be necessary for Bahrain to participate in the Bilateral Air Defense Initiative, which will provide theater ballistic missile early warning and will integrate with the HAWK-A system that the Bahrainis have already procured. The U.S.-organized Proliferation Security Initiative Leading Edge exercise will take place in Bahrain at the end of October. Bahrain will participate in the exercise, with the boarding/interrogation portion taking place in its territorial waters. Bahrain will soon sign a bilateral Chemical Weapons Convention Host Country MOU with us, another sign of cooperation in dealing with possible Iranian challenges and attempts to cause friction between the U.S. and Bahrain.

15. (C) Bahrain's relationship with Iran is complex. The Bahraini leadership is united in its suspicion of Iranian intentions regarding Bahrain and often sees an Iranian hand in incidents involving Bahrain's Shia community, which comprises some 70 percent of the country's citizens. They are convinced Iran seeks to develop nuclear weapons and assert its influence around the region. At the same time, Bahrain faces the reality that it must live with its large

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neighbor across the Gulf. Bahrain maintains "correct" but not warm diplomatic relations with Iran, with Bahraini leaders welcoming Iranian officials when they visit. Bahraini officials repeatedly assert their strong view that the international community should engage in diplomacy to deal with Iran, and not resort to a military solution. They recognize, however, that a robust military posture can facilitate diplomacy. The economic relationship is based on Bahraini imports of Iranian fruit and other foodstuffs and some Iranian investment in Bahrain. It is not clear that the Bahraini leadership has come to grips with how it will handle efforts to ratchet up the pressure on Iran if that includes, for example, calls for cutbacks in trade and engagement.

Next Steps on Iraq

16. (C) The GOB publicly supports U.S. operations in Iraq, but as the Crown Prince Salman told GEN Abizaid, it believes Iraqi forces should be moving to the front lines in place of coalition forces. He believes there would be three benefits to such a move: it would (a) shore up support in the United States for continued military engagement in Iraq; (b) force Iraqis to take responsibility for their own security; and (c) put the GOI into the position of requesting assistance from its Arab neighbors, which it has not yet done. You could brief your interlocutors on the state of play in Iraq and urge them to continue their public support of the Iraqi government. The GOB's greatest concern related to Iraq is that sectarian tensions and violence could spill over into Bahrain. Bahraini officials will support long-term measures to reduce sectarian violence while recognizing that the near-term situation in Iraq is extremely difficult.

Participation in Combined Task Force

17. (C) The King and CP have affirmed their interest in the Bahraini Navy participating in coalition operations in the

region, in particular in Combined Task Force (CTF) 150, which patrols the Arabian Sea, or CTF-152, in the Gulf. NAVCENT VADM Walsh told the CP October 11 that NAVCENT and the Bahraini Navy are engaged in a constructive conversation about Bahrain's participation. He noted that Bahrain could participate in many ways, including information exchange, placement of liaison officers, or commitment of ships and other resources.

Counter-Terrorism Law

¶8. (S) A counter-terrorism bill entitled "Protecting Society from Terrorists Acts" entered into force in August. The law defines the types of acts considered to be terrorism, applies tough penalties, and criminalizes conspiracy to commit terrorist acts. There is some question about whether the conspiracy clause will hold up given the constitutional court's June decision that a similar article in the penal code was unconstitutional. In a first test of the law, the prosecutor general in late September released eight Bahrainis on bond following an investigation into possible terrorist activities. Although several members of the cell admitted to planning to travel to Afghanistan for "jihad," the prosecutor general decided he did not have enough evidence to charge them under the CT law.

Elections Announced for November 25

¶9. (C) The King announced September 28 that the first round of parliamentary and municipal elections will be held on November 25 and the second round one week later on December ¶2. All of the formerly boycotting political societies have registered with the government and announced their participation in the elections. The new parliament will include a much broader cross-section of Bahraini political opinion, enhancing its credibility. A recently leaked report drafted by a former advisor to a minister and senior member of the ruling family alleges that the minister had organized a secret team and disbursed over \$2.5 million in an attempt to sway election results. The resulting uproar has roiled

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the political scene with many politicians and societies demanding an investigation and removal of those involved in the conspiracy. Possibly in response to the outcry, the King announced that e-voting would not be used in the elections, a key demand of activists and oppositionists, and there is a likelihood that truly independent election monitors will be allowed to deploy.

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